

Postcoloniality in India and Latin America: Neo-liberal Modernity, Urban Dystopia and Youth Experience in Cinema

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In India as well as in Latin America, cinema provides a fascinating site of analysis and serves as a medium that not only articulates but also actively intervenes in discursive constructions of imperial, national and postcolonial identities. In this paper we focus on the shifting contours of modernity, globality and postcoloniality as experienced by the youth in Latin America and India through an analysis of two films, *Amores perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu 2000) and *Yuva* (Mani Ratnam 2004). Both films foreground youth experience in two of the fastest urbanizing contemporary postcolonial metropolises of the Global South: Mexico City and Kolkata.

Overcoming Absences in Postcolonial Studies

At a first glance, Indian and Latin American cinemas might not appear obvious subjects of comparison, given the socio-cultural divergences, absence of historical linkages and difference of scale in the cinematic industries in the two regions, not to mention the vastly different cinematic idiom of Bollywood. Our choice for comparison, to begin with, is guided by the simple fact that Mani Ratnam's *Yuva* is clearly inspired by *Amores perros*: it borrows its hyperlinked episodic narrative structure, interweaving three life stories, as well as its focus on urban dystopia, from the latter film. In both films, the city, once symbolizing the lures of modernization, becomes the site of thwarted desires within the decay of the paternalistic postcolonial state.

But can this comparative approach be taken any further than this? While the structural similarities between Latin American countries and India are apparent in the economic sphere, it is an established fact that

Indian postcolonial theorists from Homi Bhabha to Gayatri Spivak, pre-occupied as they are with north-western Europe's former colonies, have excluded Latin America's colonial experience from the ambit of their theorizations on postcolonialism. In his inaugural lecture to a course on Latin American thought organized by Casa de las Américas in Havana in August 1996, Roberto Fernández Retamar pointed out that one of the stimuli for organizing the course was precisely the studied absence of the Latin American experience from the field known variously as colonial discourse or postcolonial theory. Commenting on Edward Said's book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he said that what caught his attention was the fact that "es un libro de tanta sabiduría nuestra América estuviera casi ausente" (Fernández Retamar 2003: 171).

Fernández Retamar goes on to discuss other examples,¹ but finds the Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak epitomizing this exclusion of Latin America. In her paper at a conference on cultural values held at the University of London in 1988 (later included as a chapter in her book *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 1993), she had claimed that, "as Ariel-Caliban debates dramatize, Latin America has *not* participated in decolonization" (Spivak 1993: 57). As a response to this exclusion of Latin America on the part of one of the leading theorists in the influential trinity of post-colonial studies, Fernández Retamar asked: "[...] y si la América Latina *no* ha participado en la descolonización, ¿cómo se llama aquello en que *sí* ha participado durante más de dos siglos?" (Fernández Retamar 2003: 171).

Magical Realism and the Global Debates on Neo-colonial Discourses

Gayatri Spivak's remark, flippant though it was in ignoring Latin America's discursive agency in the decolonization process, was prompted by her discomfort at the commoditization of magical realism as paradigmatic of Third World style. "Why is 'magical realism' paradigmatic of Third World literary production?" she asked, adding, "[T]here is, after all, a reason why

¹ The other example he quotes is that of Patrick Williams's and Laura Chrisman's *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (1994), which was the first postcolonial studies reader, and does not include a single Ibero-American author, as also the later anthology compiled by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffins (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 1995).

Latin America qualifies as the norm of 'the Third World' for the United States, even as India used to be the authentic margin for the British" (Spivak 1993: 57). In an obvious allusion to Salman Rushdie, she comments that "it is interesting that 'magical realism', a style of Latin American provenance, has been used to great effect by some expatriate or diasporic subcontinentals writing in English" (Spivak 1993: 57). Her paper was a reading of Mrinal Sen's film *Genesis* but Spivak was prefacing it with a reflection on the ways in which metropolitan academic interest in the so-called Third World can become complicit in the production of a neo-colonial discourse, a kind of "new orientalism" (Spivak 1993: 56). However, as Erna von der Walde has very perceptively suggested, Spivak was not able to see that such canonization of magical realism, making it the sole interpretive schema to approach Latin American fiction, and by extension, all postcolonial writing, was not so much because of some inherent quality of the Latin American style, but was rather a reading strategy that brought Latin American literary and cultural production into what von der Walde terms "a discursive colonization".² This is the move made, for example, by Fredric Jameson, when he valorizes magical realism in film and identifies the three shared features that he believes contribute to a visual experience that rescues the image from the commoditization found in the first world's postmodern films (Jameson 1986: 303). Such global commodification of what is perceived as cultural difference is what Graham Huggan (2001) has called "the postcolonial exotic" and it would seem that it still haunts academia when it comes to dealing with non-western cultural production.³

A recent doctoral dissertation from the University of Kentucky, examining the non-realist representational mode of much of Indian cinema and its preference for metaphor and allegory, concludes that the development

2 Von der Walde observes: "En lugar de sospechar del realismo mágico por la acogida que se le da en el Primer Mundo, (Spivak) sospecha del por qué proviene de América Latina, y cubre toda la región con un veredicto que tiene el carácter de agenda" (von der Walde 1998: 216).

3 Reacting to such essentializing of Latin American difference and the treatment of magical realism as a heuristic instrument for the interpretation of Latin American reality, contemporary writers in Latin America, such as the Chileans Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, have attempted to create a transnational Latin American global identity in their imaginary of what they call *McOndo*, a juxtaposition of the pop referents of neoliberal modernity (McDonald's, Macintosh computers) as opposed to the 'folkloric' Macondo elaborated by magical realism. In cinema, too, the Latin American city is the protagonist of a host of contemporary films, but unlike Fuguet's prosperous globalized spaces, the city in cinema is a contested space.

of an unreal cinematic discourse “emphasizes the postcolonial condition in the manner of magical realism in postcolonial literature” (Sengupta 2011: 7-8) and that “like magical realism in Latin American literature, the unreal of Indian cinema proclaims the postcolonial condition of the Indian nation” (Sengupta 2011: 16). Making it clear that it was not merely a matter of technique, but that of a postcolonial political consciousness, the researcher further argues that “the alleged unreal of Indian cinema arises [...] out of the narrative needs of the postcolonial subject” (Sengupta 2011: 98-99) just as “postcolonial fiction tends to rely on unrealistic devices mostly in the form of magical realism in order to symbolize the national and transnational positioning of the postcolonial subject” (Sengupta 2011: 105).

Cinematic Dialogues: Bollywood and Latin American Cinema

This collapsing of Latin American magical realism and the non-realist mode of representation in Indian popular cinema as paradigmatic of postcolonial consciousness is highly problematic, because difference is then defined only by reference to the globally dominant western realist mode of representation. As Madhav Prasad points out, “the (western) cinematic apparatus [...] has its determining effects on film making in a (post)colonial context, serving as a model for a modern aesthetic that every modern nation must aspire to (re)produce [...] with prescriptions for achieving an international style realist cinema” (Prasad 1998: 3-5). It is for this reason that film and media studies have considered Bollywood cinema as a “not yet cinema [...]” (Prasad 1998: 2). And scholarship both within and outside India has been dismissive of its “technicolor fantasies catering to the masses” (Desai/Dudrah 2008: 1). Sengupta is quite right in suggesting that in a global scenario where most films are judged primarily by the accolades and parameters of the West, it has been difficult to emphasize the distinctive nature of postcolonial Indian cinematic production, let alone establish a theoretical basis for it (Sengupta 2011: 1). However, with the exponential growth of this film industry, with an audience exceeding any other globally, Indian cinema has eventually ‘provincialized’ Hollywood, and its sheer commercial volumes and global consumption have turned it into a significant area of academic inquiry in India and abroad (Desai/Du-

drah 2008: 1). Latin American cinema, too, has seen a recent resurgence and earned global attention.⁴ However, while in the current era of globalization there is a movement among national cinemas to accede to transnational cultural industries, there are only limited instances of cinematic dialogue or intertextuality between Bollywood and the film industries in Latin America. For this reason the structural and thematic similarity between *Amores perros* and *Yuva* seemed significant enough to provide space for a comparison of the way in which neoliberal modernity and urban dystopia have been represented in these two films from India and Latin America. Both films were successful at the box office as well as receiving critical acclaim.⁵

The comparative approach of this analysis serves a number of purposes. Our thesis is that both films deal with youthful aspirations in post-colonial contexts and place the failure of the postcolonial developmentalist state at the crux of their argument. Both films were produced and released at moments of political transition in their respective countries: the release of *Amores perros* in May 2000 in Cannes and later in June of the same year in Mexico coincided with the Mexican general elections that witnessed the end of the long uninterrupted rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) since the Mexican Revolution, with Vicente Fox assuming the Presidency. Critically-acclaimed filmmaker Mani Ratnam's *Yuva* was released on May 21, 2004,⁶ coinciding with the general elections to the 14th Lok Sabha in India, in which the electorate passed a damning verdict against the ruling Right-wing coalition and its slogan of a "Shining India", and a beleaguered centrist Congress party formed a coalition government when it was least expected to. The two films employ completely differ-

4 For example, Hollywood has financed a number of transnational blockbusters by Mexican directors such as Alfonso Cuarón (*Children of Men*, 2006), Guillermo del Toro (*Hellboy*, 2004), and Alejandro González Iñárritu (*21 Grams*, 2003; *Babel*, 2006) as well as those of Brazilian directors like Walter Salles (*The Motorcycle Diaries*, 2004) and Fernando Meirelles (*The Constant Gardener*, 2005).

5 *Amores perros* won over thirty awards, including the most successful film in Mexico in the year 2000. It won the BAFTA award for Best Film (not in English Language) as well as a nomination for the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film, apart from having previously won the Critic's Prize at Cannes. Ratnam's *Yuva*, too, won several Filmfare awards for 2004: Best Screenplay (Mani Ratnam), Best Art Direction (Sabu Cyril), Best Supporting Actor (Abhishek Bachchan), Best Supporting Actress (Rani Mukherjee) and Critics Award for Best Movie (Mani Ratnam).

6 Ratnam also shot the Tamil version of *Yuva*, entitled *Aayutha Ezhuthu*, which was released simultaneously.

ent idioms: while *Amores perros* is a nihilistic look at the moral decay of contemporary Mexican society and debunks prevailing notions of citizenship through a complete erasure of the state, *Yuva*, though presenting a bleak picture of dystopic negation, finally recuperates the neo-liberal state through a nationalist discourse, and urges the citizen to collaborate in the making of a globalized India. In neither of the two do we find a renewed possibility for societal change, though both films have been considered to be progressive. This reading will be questioned in this paper. We will first proceed with a close reading of each of the filmic texts before returning to a comparison.

González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* and Ratman's *Yuva*

González Iñárritu's film juxtaposes three independent stories, which converge, collide and momentarily intertwine in an automobile accident, which is the opening sequence of the film. The three narratives are linked in the logic of modern soap operas (Smith 2003: 38-39). The first segment, "Octavio and Susana", is set in a working class *barrio* of Mexico City. Octavio, an adolescent in love with his sister-in-law, Susana, wants to escape with her from the slums of Mexico City. He raises money through dog-fights, hoping to save enough to leave the squalor behind, but finally descends into a spiral that culminates in a haunting, isolated, lonely existence. In the second segment, "Daniel and Valeria", the viewer is transported into a story set in the context of the Mexican bourgeoisie: an unfaithful husband who leaves his family to be with a model, whose world crumbles after a car accident. After losing her leg in the accident, Valeria experiences a claustrophobic alienation in the confines of her apartment, while her relationship with Daniel deteriorates to the extent that there are indications of his wanting to return to the family he abandoned. The third segment tells the story of El Chivo, yesterday's revolutionary and today's paid assassin, who is trying to get in touch with his daughter Maru, whom he had abandoned in the heady days of revolutionary activity.

As in *Amores perros*, *Yuva* too opens with a horrific incident – a murder being committed on Kolkata's new Hooghly Bridge. Through the use of multiple flashbacks, the film interweaves the stories of three young men, fortuitously present at the site of the accident in this opening scene which

is the core moment in the plot of the film.⁷ The first segment tells us of Lallan, a small-time gangster, surviving in the city by running an extortion racket. His wife Sashi suffers his abuse and violence, hoping for his ultimate redemption, but Lallan becomes the right-hand hatchet man of a corrupt politician, Prasanjit Babu, and on his orders he goes after a group of students from Kolkata's prestigious Presidency College. As the violence escalates, Lallan becomes completely embroiled in the underbelly of Kolkata. Only when the loss of his unborn child hits him does he realize that perhaps there is a better life away from the quagmire that he seems to wallow in.

Then comes Michael's story. Brought up in a middle-class family with idealistic values, Michael is a part of the student group that wants to weed out political corruption. Lallan is sent to finish him off in order to put an end to his efforts to organize the suburban poor to defy the corrupt political class in an election. Michael's girlfriend Radhika, a teacher of French, moves in with him when she discovers that she is pregnant with his child, without marrying him first, in defiance of social norms. In a fateful ride on the Hooghly Bridge, Michael gives a lift on his motorcycle to Arjun Balakrishnan, who is chasing his fleeing girlfriend Meera, and this is how Arjun becomes an eyewitness to Michael's shooting by Lallan, who had been following him by vehicle.

This episode leads to a flashback focusing on Arjun's narrative. A completely apolitical student from Kolkata's prestigious Presidency College, Arjun is paradigmatic of the new, Indian middle-class youth, leading a consumerist lifestyle in a changing urban India marked with nightclubs and fleeting romances. His dream is to emigrate to the United States and get a green card, even as his father wants him to join the Indian Administrative Service. A few days before his visa interview, he meets the spunky Meera in a discotheque. She is soon to be wed in an arranged marriage with a manufacturer from Kanpur but is open to a brief flirtation. Their mutual attraction makes him follow Meera to the airport, leading to the chance encounter with Michael; the horrific episode on the bridge inspires him to abandon his pursuit of greener pastures and join Michael's political cause. The film ends with Michael and his other young colleagues confidently entering the Legislative Assembly House as elected members,

7 Philip Lutgendorf (2007) provides a detailed discussion on the film's plot and its relationship to earlier Bollywood films.

ostensibly to inject politics with a new idealism. Lallan is thrown into the dustbin of history, as we last see him in the same prison yard from which he had emerged at the beginning of the film, this time awaiting his imminent execution for the killing of his brother, his wife having abandoned him after aborting their child.

Urban Dystopia, Violence, and the Subaltern

As we can see, both films present a cynical and sanguinary vision of contemporary reality and the postcolonial state. Most studies on the two films have pointed to the hyperbolic and gratuitous urban violence that dominates the narrative. In *Amores perros*, apart from violence (Sánchez-Prado 2006; Herlinghaus 2008) there is also a fatalism and a murderous urban dystopia from which there seems to be neither escape nor respite (Reber 2010: 281). However, violence is shown as intrinsic to the subaltern in both the films. The most violent segments are those relating to Octavio and Lallan. For both it is a way of life. Lallan's violence, though political, is not in support of any revolutionary cause or social change and, as in Octavio's case, is caused by his progressive moral decay. The violence even leads to fratricide: in *Amores perros*, Ramiro is killed by his brother Octavio and in *Yuva* it is Lallan who kills his own brother. Violence in Michael's case, however, has a purpose: to cleanse the system. The actions of the educated middle class youth have a positive influence on the system and lead to the victory of good over evil.

In *Amores perros*, the progress of the story is governed by a deterministic fatality, as in a Greek tragedy (Reyes 2004: 179). The canine metaphors, prevalent throughout the film, serve to elucidate precisely this determinism. For example, in the first segment with Octavio and Susana, when the dog Cofi is introduced for the first time, he is just a pet, but when he is made to fight with other dogs, he transforms into a brutal, ferocious dog with a spontaneous inborn aggressiveness, an inherent aspect of his nature. It is this understanding of violence that is echoed in Octavio, and in his relationship with his brother Ramiro. Violence in *Amores perros*, while

as gritty, graphic and aestheticized⁸ as in the Tarantino films to which it has been compared (Sánchez-Prado 2006: 39), serves a distinct purpose. While Tarantino's violence seems to be meta-cinematic, and at times even attempts to satirize the appetite for violence while simultaneously fulfilling it, González Iñárritu's violence in *Amores perros* is presented as asocial, that is, not problematized as a social question, but seen as a sort of 'natural' violence, inherent in the protagonist's nature. Aggression lurks not just in the streets and alleys of the slums and the underbelly of Mexico City, where violence is considered endemic, but is most prevalent in those intimate sites that should serve as a haven from violence. As Podalsky notes, in these narratives, "the home is not an escape from the violence of the outside world, but rather the very site in which hostile actions and petty cruelties are carried out with excruciating familiarity" (Podalsky 2003: 282).

The deterministic moralism that serves as a thematic link throughout the film is explicit towards the end of the film, when Octavio, after his own accident and the death of his brother, continues to pursue his plan to escape with Susana; she tells him sarcastically, verbalising this deterministic ideology: "Si quieres hacer reír a Dios, cuéntale tus planes". It is this karmic narrative progression whereby punishment awaits the characters that sin. The same karmic and deterministic moralism is apparent even in the second section: the car accident itself functions as a form of divine justice that punishes the sinners. The canine metaphor, the princely and fragile Richie trapped under the floor and surrounded by rats, parallels the psychological condition of the couple in the apartment, more specifically the static character of Valeria, who – paralysed in a wheelchair – is tantamount to a discarded commodity that holds no relevance to the market and is left as empty as the advertisement hoarding which once held her image and provided her existence with meaning, or more precisely a usefulness for the market.

El Chivo's misanthropy appears to be an evocation of discontent and disillusionment with the socialist utopia. "El Chivo utilizes the dogs as substitutes for people, transferring his love to them. His excessive devotion toward the animals is logomorphically, albeit quixotically, combined with

8 An example of this aestheticization of violence could be the montage sequence with very quick extreme close-ups of Octavio and Susana's faces as they make love, interspersed with crosscutting shots of the horrible beating of Ramiro by thugs hired by his brother, all skillfully accompanied by Nacha Pop's song "Lucha de gigantes" playing extradiegetically (Reyes 2004: 200)

his misanthropic attitudes” (Wendorf/Morley 2004). The dog’s inherent characteristic of violent behaviour, established in the first segment, reaches its brutal crescendo in the segment when it devours all the other dogs in El Chivo’s home. However, through the relationship between El Chivo and his dog, one also notices an attempt at redemption suggested in what is probably one of the most ambiguous moments of the film, the closing scene. It is ambiguous because while suggesting a possible redemption, it is a redemption that is lit by a dark vision of modernity, suggesting that redemption exists only through a repentance of what has been, impressing upon the viewer the dominant themes that characterise the film: bitter karmic fatalism and disillusionment with the evolution of postcolonial Mexican society and its dream of a better world, a dream that collapsed along with the Berlin Wall.

As in *Amores perros*, in *Yuva*, too, the subaltern is finally shown to have no redemption: Like Octavio Lallan too descends into a spiral that culminates in a miserable, stunted, lonely existence. But a world of possibilities awaits the educated upper-middle-class boys, Michael and Arjun are last seen striding confidently into the halls of power as people’s elected representatives in full enjoyment of their citizenship.

State, Citizenship, and the Subaltern

While in *Amores perros* there is an “overthrow” of the state through its complete erasure – no policemen, no politicians, no law enforcement agencies are ever visible in the film – the nationalist discourse in *Yuva*, functioning within the Bollywood idiom, examines citizenship *vis-à-vis* the neoliberal state. The political argument is articulated through the characters and their stories. The film exhorts educated middle class urban youth to actively participate in the state machinery, which is portrayed as corroded by corrupt politicians aided by the active collusion of the lumpen proletariat (personified in the figure of Lallan), the barbaric Other of civil society. This, of course, is not a call for structural transformation, nor is it ever a critique of neoliberalism, but rather an invocation to the educated urban middle class (and not the subaltern) to correct the misuse of political authority and to reform the system by taking over the state. The problems of postcolonial India thus owe their origin not to systemic structures, but to character

defects, the transformation of which can effectively be carried out by Michael, the educated nationalist, and Arjun, who abandons his postcolonial desire (Anjaria/Anjaria 2008) to travel to the USA in order to participate in nation-building in the era of globalization.

The film suggests that the failure of the developmentalist state – presented as a character defect and not a structural problem – can be remedied through capture of state power by the enlightened youth of civil society. The film has been read as an attempt “to resignify youth beyond the utopic story and its dystopic negation” (Anjaria/Anjaria 2008: 136). It is argued that by “reinvigorating the social world with an ethical alternative to consumption and irresponsibility, *Yuva* recentres the youth as the subject of history within a progressive social landscape” (Anjaria/Anjaria 2008: 137).

The film should, in fact, be read with later films such as *Rang de Basanti* (2006) that evoke pre-independence nationalistic ideals or post-independence Nehruvian nation-building. This might be done by taking up responsibilities individually, be it for rural development as in *Swades* or for the restructuring of corrupted political systems as in *Rang de Basanti* and *Yuva*, because that is a viable source of national pride (Sengupta 2011: 68), and possibly more acceptable in the era of globalization to the liberal educated class of Indians, who are fed on the rhetoric of 8% growth and India as an emergent economy and upcoming superpower. So what is questioned is what went wrong in keeping up the nationalistic spirit, and the effort is focused on re-establishing pride in the nation through positive contributions to the Nehruvian rebuilding of the nation.⁹

It is important to highlight the contrast and register the break separating post-globalization films like *Yuva* from the “Angry Young Man” genre of 1970s Bollywood. The 70s was a period of intense political upheaval that saw the breakdown of the consensus on the Nehruvian model of nation-building, and popular cinema reinvented itself to capture this political volatility, with films becoming more strident in addressing endemic corruption and the state’s inability to stem it. It is these films that constructed the “mobilized subaltern hero” in the persona of Amitabh Bachchan (Prasad 1998: 138-159). The subaltern in *Yuva* (played by none

9 As an aside, one may also take into consideration that this shift towards an explicitly urban middle-class-centric appeal has been seen to inspire various IIT graduates to choose a career in politics. See the report in *The Times of India*, 18.01.2007. Online: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Bollywood-inspired_IITians_eyeing_polls/articleshow/1260234.cms> (15.05.2014).

other than Amitabh Bachchan's real-life son) is no longer seen as the 'sub-altern hero', but is, in fact, an obstacle in the path towards political redemption. In *Amores perros* too, El Chivo represents the phantom figure of the "fallen father" (Herlinghaus 2008: 597) as an alienated postscript to the revolutionary fervour of the Latin America of the 1960s.

In *Yuva*, the choice of Kolkata as the locale is important. Kolkata has been seen as the citadel of the left movement, so the corrupt politician in power could well be from the Left. This is an attack on a political class as a whole, as seen recently in the anti-corruption movement for the Jan Lokpal Bill led by Anna Hazare, and the corporate media frenzy it provoked, making Arundhati Roy comment:

For completely different reasons, and in completely different ways, you could say that the Maoists and the Jan Lokpal Bill have one thing in common – they both seek *the overthrow of the Indian State*. One working from the bottom up, by means of an armed struggle, waged by a largely adivasi army, made up of the poorest of the poor. The other, from the top down, by means of a bloodless Gandhian coup, led by a freshly minted saint, and an army of largely urban, and certainly better-off people [...]. Meanwhile the props and the choreography, the aggressive nationalism and flag-waving of Anna's Revolution are all borrowed, from the anti-reservation protests, the world-cup victory parade, and the celebration of the nuclear tests. They signal to us that if we do not support The Fast, we are not 'true Indians'. The 24-hour channels have decided that there is no other news in the country worth reporting. (Roy 2011: n.p., emphasis mine)

The political and economic crisis of the late 90s is not simply the result of a failed nationalism, as the film suggests. This crisis is a consequence of the withdrawal of the state from its regulatory and governing functions, under the pressure of transnational forces, a withdrawal that has radically modified the relationship between the state and civil society. As David Harvey suggests, "the effect of such movements has been to shift the terrain of political organizations away from traditional political parties and labor organizing into a less focused political dynamic of social action across the whole spectrum of civil society" (Harvey 2005: 200). Harvey concludes that such movements "draw strength from being embedded in the nitty-gritty of daily life and struggle, but in so doing they often find it hard to extract themselves from the local and the particular to understand the macro-politics of what neoliberal accumulation by dispossession and its relation to the restoration of class power was and is all about" (Harvey 2005: 200).

Yuva coincides with the view that sees “new civil society movements”, that is non-traditional, non-worker-oriented political movements in civil society, as the only legitimate source of oppositional politics. Moreover, the attempt to paint the masses (Lallan) as endemically violent leads to the position that the agents of change are the techno-managerial upper-middle class, that is, sectors that have benefitted the most from the neoliberal state.

In *Amores perros* there is no such triumphalism. As Laura Podalsky notes, the film’s characters are shown as having lost the “ability to make substantive proposals for a better future” (Podalsky 2003: 284). The loss of the paternalistic state, the complete erasure of the state organs, the failure of the socialist utopia which fired the generation of the 1960s, the rejection of revolutionary nationalism, and the disintegration and fragmentation of all social units, including the family, turn the film into a “post-modern resignation to neoliberal globalization” (Abeyta 2007: 8), as also noted by modern cultural commentators like Roger Bartra, who interpret revolutionary nationalism’s failure as largely insular and specific to Mexico and unrelated to the transnational processes that have changed Mexican society since the 1980s (Bartra 2003).

And that is not all. Most critics have highlighted the transnational appeal of the film. Marvin D’Lugo locates this in the “devastating portrait of visceral violence and fatalism becoming the privileged image of Mexico” (D’Lugo 2003: 228) which González Iñárritu has inherited as a lesson from masters like Arturo Ripstein, whose “cinema is less caught up with depicting social reality than with developing a brutal, even nihilistic but ultimately cinematic vision of Mexico which had a strong appeal to European and North American audiences” (D’Lugo 2003: 228-229). Sánchez-Prado holds that “the film appeals to a transnational market that reinterprets violence as an allegory of the new possibilities of political expression after the fall of the Berlin Wall” (Sánchez-Prado 2006: 40); in his view, *Amores perros* is “part of a larger group of Latin American films that have ridden a wave of success in metropolitan markets: Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund’s *Cidade de Deus* and Barbet Schroeder’s *La Virgen de los sicarios*” (Sánchez-Prado 2006: 40). In this sense, Sánchez-Prado argues further that the “magical-realist imperative is now accompanied by a ‘violent imperative’” and “in a sort of perverse *neomacondismo*, the discourse of civilization versus barbarism is rearticulated as metropolitan spectators begin to think of an otherness founded on violence” (Sánchez-Prado 2006:

50). In fact, as Koonings and Kruijt point out, in Latin American cities, “the notion of urban insecurity, violence and fear have in recent years taken on the signal role earlier performed by notions such as poverty, marginality and informality” (Koonings/Kruijt 2007: 2).

Films such as *Yuva* and *Amores perros* can be considered as “global localizations” of the “perturbing experiences inscribed in urban neoliberal modernity” (Herlinghaus 2008: 593). The moral idealism of collective action to revive the nation state, as in *Yuva*, or the cynical disillusionment with revolutionary nationalism, as seen in *Amores perros* – while foregrounding youth experience in two of the fastest urbanizing contemporary postcolonial metropolises of the Global South and confronting viewers with the new geographies of social exclusion and modern urban dystopia – fail to offer a critique of the paradigms of development the postcolonial nation states have chosen, which result in such exclusionary urban cartographies. While *Yuva* and other youth films from Bollywood seem to address a target audience of non-resident Indians, urging the upwardly mobile educated Indian middle-class to collaborate with global capitalism in reinvigorating India, *Amores perros* caters to a transatlantic audience seeking new ways of relating to Latin America while echoing its own middle-class’s insecurities about the marginalized sectors, themselves a product of neoliberal agendas. In neither of the two do we find a renewed possibility for societal change.

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